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LITERATURE AND SOCIETY

Tevia Abrams

Mention of the words "art" and "society" in the same breath nowadays is not unlike starting the angel-pin controversy of centuries ago. Emotion charges the atmosphere and intellect takes cover behind tradition-pyramided volumes. Unless there is familiarity with the professional jargon, chances are anything proffered will be waived down reproachingly.

Nevertheless, if we genuflect quickly before the giants of the aesthetic world and skirt the ponderable abstracts, it is possible to review with some assuredness an age-old shibboleth — the significance of literature for present-day society.

Significance in any sense at all is acknowledged by the fact that throughout history, man has been moved to action by ideas, which of course are the "stuff" of literature. To use an extreme example, it was the ideal of Marxist philosophy, and the deep probing by such powerful artists as Dostoievsky and Gorky, that brought the plight of trodden Russia to national consciousness and ultimately to revolution. The relation of Voltaire's satire and invective to the French revolution is another extreme case.

If we can isolate the sociological significance of literature for a moment, it would be possible to discern a dynamic relation between art and society. Any given age naturally seems peculiar to the one having preceded it because the old ideas, values, social needs and social temperament are all subject to reappraisal and change. The "Zeitgeist", or spirit of the times, is always in a state of flux, and as a result new relationships between needs, values and conduct are established. Literature — one of the major arts — is by nature a sensitive mirror and will reflect its particular environment, attempt, consciously or otherwise, to meet the new challenge of a new age.

Of course, a masterful work will do this and achieve a measure of timelessness and universality as well. Just because we do not share the same frame of reference as the Elizabethans — e.g., the chain of being — there is no reason to suppose Shakespeare's plays are meaningless for today's audiences. The problems of a Hamlet, for example, come close to those faced by present-day man. Hamlet, steeped in medieval tradition, was somehow "out of joint" as he stood intelligently on the threshold of a strange, new and exciting age of exploration and invention. He couldn't act in the manner expected of a man in medieval society, and yet he couldn't quite escape the hold of his

background altogether. So today, many cling to out-moded ideologies while witnessing the birth-pangs of a bold, new, technocratic world of automation. The resulting indecision, confusion, hesitation and neurotic patterns of thought and action are all peculiar to both Hamlet and 20th Century man.

Psychologically, the relation of art to society is more consistent, and less dependent on shift in social emphases throughout the ages. Literature in any age can pluck the feelings, moods and attitudes of its audience. There is no denying that a good novel, poem or play can manipulate the emotions, running the scale from laughter to tears. With a master craftsman at the keyboard, a conjured experience may indeed be a powerful one. As far back as Aristotle, significance for the psyche of art was unquestioned, and the ancient philosopher-scientist was able to write from a theatrical tradition long passed, of purging emotion through artistically contrived tragedy.

With such potential to affect, to unsettle, to search, literature becomes an instrument of experience. If the experience of everyday living, haphazard as it is, is the stuff that nourishes or sucks the spirit and life of an individual, think of the possibilities from well-conjured, vicarious experience, which is certainly very "real" to the "involved" reader or audience. Ideally, insight and understanding of "la condition humaine" may be provided, even, perhaps, a restructuring of intellectual and emotional orientation — for better or worse.

For better or worse is a necessary qualification at this point to correct the tendency toward art as a didactic instrument. Nothing has been said so far of literature as sheer sensual pleasure and as "expression" per se. What of sensual beauty? What about the flow of language that wines the reader's imagination to liberated intoxication, the stirring image and beautiful description? Nothing much, except that unless the beauty is allied to the substance that is life in all its myriad varieties and complexities, it will be quite meaningless, possibly escapist, and at best an embellishment of the spiritual aridity which is evident today. As far as expression is concerned, there are no boundaries, and except that a work is controlled by the artist's intellect, moral and ethical considerations mean little against the background of the finished work. Even so staunch a Catholic as Jacques Maritain maintains with the Scholastics that the end of a work is governed not so much by moral standards as by the needs and "formal good" of the work itself. Only lesser artists fall into the trap of didacticism. If art can restructure intellectual and emotional orientation, it must therefore be granted for better or worse.

This potential of literature lies in its derivation from the chaos of unordered life-experience, which is transformed by the artist into a formal ordering, or integrated pattern of thought, feeling and emotion. The writer with insight into the psyche can willingly or not be of service to the growing number of neurotics; and since normalcy is unfashionable today, one must assume the artist has his work cut out for him. The point being made is that a really good novel, poem or play, if experienced fully on emotional and intellectual levels, can have as much effect as a session with the psychoanalyst.

In the final analysis, the potential of any work depends upon its communication. After all, why bother to blow the dust from the classical tragedies or from the Divine Comedy if no one will read them? Why should the artist today struggle so laboriously over a novel if his effort will go unread? By communication is meant identification with, or feeling for a situation or character of a book, play or movie, and the involvement to a degree, depending at once on the quality of the work produced and sensitivity of the individual. The sensitive person, for example, watching a production of "Death of a Salesman", might derive insight into his own character, or he could conceivably find a parallel to tragic Willie Loman in himself. Thereafter, if he has not sufficiently despaired, he may try to avoid Willie's fate. At least he may attempt a more meaningful rationale of his life. On the other hand, despair and disillusionment might result from communication with Sartre's morbidity or the spiritless dramas of contemporary stage.

Potential granted, what then of the quality of literature being produced today? Unfortunately, only a handful of important writers are left who have anything significant to say to a society experiencing cultural anarchy. Perhaps this is because the forces at work in de-spiriting society are so subtle as to be disarming, and what is worse, anonymous. As for a sensitively receptive audience for whom the visionary artist can write, there are only scattered individuals, struggling against the forces of conformism and mediocrity. Devastating studies are to be found in recent sociological writings.

It is unfortunate that the writer with talent is being forced today, out of financial necessity, to serve a mass media for mass edification. And the culture he produces, while doubtless entertaining in pocket-book, radio, TV and movie form, serves only to lull society — out of touch with tradition as well as with itself — into an effortless dream-world from which there appears to be no escape.

Oddly enough, the problem isn't the unique product of the technocratic 20th Century. Cervantes was well aware of the pitfalls, hundreds of years ago, when he wrote of Don Quixote's pathetic flight from reality, which resulted from excessive reading of romantic tales about knights in shining armour. Today, of course, we don't have to read any tales — we don't have to read at all. The knights come charging onto the screens in thousands of homes and theatres across the continent.

To say literature is imperiled today would almost be a tritism, were this fact not so lamentable. If this article points to anything of significance, it is the argument that literature has a *potential* for socio-psychiatric therapy, which can be usefully exploited by artists using modern facilities of communication. Paradoxically, the very media with such promise are those being abused and aborted to serve a spiritually degenerate society in a spiritually degenerate way. The circle is vicious, and the whirlpool, deep.

FOUR SEASONS OF A ROOM

D. Kraslavsky

Once, in our winter room entwined,
We watched the circling wind attack
A slow recoiling street grown cypress,
Which like a newly pensioned illness
Proudly fenced its one awaiting shadow.
While forged forks of winter beaten branches
Were plunged toward the silted sidewalk
We brawled and bartered for the final consumation
Of our first indoor season.

Then, when the warring wind
Waving its plundered snow swords
Cut through the comfort of our double window
And pinned us unarmed against the floor,
We felt the flesh each of the other's fears
Warm to the friction of our covered skins.
Wearing each others bodies as cloaks
To guard against the entered city
I told you of my empty bible
In which you wrote the sensual book of psalms
That found my voice a lover.

DIALOGISM

Gerald Tenenbaum

He turned from the window and sat down at his writing-desk. The cigarette he had been smoking had burned down almost to the filter, and he squashed it in the glass ash-tray, watching the blue-white smoke curl lazily upwards. For a moment, he almost burst out into a fit of inexplicable laughter, but he checked himself, and lit another cigarette.

Then he heard his mother's voice calling out to him from the kitchen.

"Ralph? Ralphie! Suppers ready. Ra — alph! Do you hear what I said?"

"I hear you, for chrissake," he muttered to himself. Then out loud he called back, "Coming."

He went into the bathroom and began washing his hands. From down the hall he could hear his Mother addressing his father in hushed, serious tones. He stood near the door, listening.

"Remember," his mother was saying. "Talk to him. And don't lose your temper this time. Just talk to him quietly."

"It's gonna do a lot of good," his father replied.

"You can talk to him, no? You're his father."

"He's not a baby, anymore. He wants to go — that's his business. I'm finished talking. Do you think he listens to me when I talk to him? What's the matter, I didn't talk with him before? 'You don't know what you're talking about,' he tells me. He's not even grown up from the ground yet, but already he thinks he knows more than me."

Ralph stamped noisily into the kitchen and sat down at the table. He kept his eyes intent on the bowl of soup his mother placed before him. "Nu, what took you so long?" his mother said, "Do you think I can stand here all day making supper?"

"I was washing my hands. What have you got for supper, ma?"

"Whatever there is you'll sit and eat . . ." his father said, between mouthfuls.

"Look pa, I was only asking."

"Never mind asking. Whatever your mother gives you, you'll sit and eat. What is it, a restaurant by me?"

After he finished his soup, his mother

put a steaming plate of roast meat and potatoes before him. She sat down on the empty chair, her back facing the stove.

"Ralphie . . ." she began, but her son quickly stopped her from finishing what she was going to say.

"Aw, come off it, ma. Don't start that whole business again. I thought that it was all finished with last night."

"How do you know what I'm going to say?"

"I know you, ma. Look, do me a favour will you? Just let me finish my supper in peace. My last supper, I want to enjoy it, okay?"

"Eat. Who's stopping you? Your father and I just want to know one thing. Why, tell me, do you have to leave tomorrow? Why? That's all. Just give me a good reason why you have to go tomorrow."

"Look, I already told you. I'm getting a lift tomorrow with Eddie. He's going as far as New York, and we're going to share a room for a while. Okay? That answer all your questions? Now please, just let me finish my dinner before it gets cold."

"But why all of a sudden, tomorrow? Why do you have to go right in the middle of college? You can go in the summertime . . . you can go when you finish school . . . But who ever heard of anyone just quitting school like this and going away for a trip? Tell me, did you ever hear of such a thing? In the middle of the year, going away for a trip to New York."

"I told you, ma. I told you a hundred times. I'm going to flunk the year anyway. I just don't feel like going to college anymore, and besides I can't stand all those phonies that go there."

"Other boys go to college, they join clubs, they meet nice girls . . . but you don't do anything. How do you expect—"

"I'm not hungry anymore." He pushed his plate away.

"Come on, eat. I'm not going to throw all that food away. You only took two bites . . ."

"I told you before, ma. For chrissake will you please, please leave me alone." He began toying with his food.

"Why can't you graduate first, and then go?" his mother persisted.

"Christ, here we go again. Were you listening to what I just said? I just told you I don't *want* to go back to college this year. I'm through with college. I just want to travel for a while — just get away from everything and everyone."

"What's the matter, we've treated you bad here?" his father said. "For twenty-two years we've given you everything from the best — clothes, food, everything. We did something bad to you? You've worked too hard, maybe? He wants to travel, he wants. I've been working in a factory, working since I was thirteen years old. My father didn't give me anything.

Not like you. As soon as I was old enough I started helping out in the family . . ."

"Yah, yah, I know pa . . ."

". . . I went to work. For five dollars a week in those days. I've been slaving all my life. For what? For him. For my children, to give them a chance to make something from themselves, not so they should have to work in a factory like their father. We sent you to college so you should have it easy and be able—"

"Look at your cousin Louie," his mother interrupted. "What's the matter he could finish for a dentist. He just bought himself a bungalow in Ville St. Laurent, maybe 40,000, it cost him."

"I don't care what Louie did, I'm not Louie. How many times have I told you — I don't want to be a dentist. I don't want to be a lawyer, I don't want to be a doctor, and I don't want to make a 'lot of money'." Ralph stood up pushing his plate away.

"Nu, so what *do* you want to be? Tell me, is there anything you *want* to be?" his mother asked.

"I don't know. That's why I want to go away for a while. I want to find out what I want to do with myself. I'm still young. Now's the time to find out. Maybe I want to be a writer. I don't know. I don't know if I have any talent or not. But if I go away for a while, get out on my own, away from here, travel a little, then I think I can come back knowing exactly where I stand and what I want to do with myself."

"Who ever heard of anyone making a living as a writer. How can you make money that way?" his mother asked.

"That's all you ever think of, eh ma? Money. That's the only thing that means anything to you. It's the only thing that makes you respect people. If people have money — boy, oh, boy, — do you ever look up to them."

"Money, I want you to know is everything," his father said. "When you have money everybody looks up to you. Nowadays that's all that counts. Wherever you go you need money."

"Anyways, I don't want to argue with you anymore. Please stop worrying about me. I'm not a baby anymore. I can take care of myself. I just don't want you to worry about me."

"Sam, you're going to let him go?"

"What can I do, can I stop him?"

"Who ever heard of such a crazy thing? Everybody'll laugh at him. How's he going to take care of himself?"

"Don't worry, don't worry, he'll be back soon. When his money runs out and he has to start working . . . you'll see how fast he'll come running home. Then he'll appreciate . . ."

Ralph went into his room and closed the door. He began piling some of the clothes that were laid out on his bed into the suitcase. Then he stopped and lay down across the bed, burying his head under the pillow. Tomorrow he would leave the house early. No use waking them. It would be better that way.

BRIGHTER THAN OUR SUN

Leonard Cohen

Brighter than our sun
Bright as the window beyond death
The light in the universe
Cleans the eyes to stone

They prayed for lives without visions
Free from visions but not blind
They could only drone the prayer
They could not set it down

And windows persisted
And the eyes turned stone
They all had faces like buddhas
Huge and calm

And what happened to love
In the gleaming universe
It froze in the heart of God
Froze on a spear of light.

VENT NOIR

C. J. Newman

Le vent, le vent noir
vient, sur les terraces
de ma tête il joue
un rythme
insistant et monotone.

. . . des choses, qui ne peuvent pas être
réclamés—
comme le soleil de la nuit,
visible pour un fou . . .

Il n'y a seuls que des rêves,
qui sont verts et, tout-à-coup,
sont couverts
de sang frais nourri de la terre.

THE LIQUID SUN

Peter Krohn
(For Ped)

On his palette lay,
a broken spectrum disarrayed
from turning on its axis.

The flowing tones of oil
oozed in a liquid sun
from brush to canvas
Allman
by the linseed bound.

Oh seed of flax, seed
pressed as a bowl of flour
by the silver swell,
caressed into liquid sun,
return to your father
and man will break with all;
men.

From a white marked they moved,
to dance for a moment
on the drying, crusting, dying,
oils,
as a blind man's fingers
greeting ivory keys.
Then he smeared,
and he palmed,
the spectrum
to muckblack.

WORDS OF GLASS

C. J. Newman

The fever had seemed to him like a wholly integral other being insinuating itself irresistably into his own veins; when it burned its brightest everything else flew upward like steam or fell behind like a never-to-be-retrieved ebb-tide. And so he had hoped he might be 'different' after the fever left him, he had hoped he might be relieved of the fierce eagerness to inquire, to search things out, that aimless energy which drove him along the thin edge of utter exhaustion. The fever subsided. It had moved within him for several days. He had eaten little food during that time and he may be excused for mistaking, in the aftermath of his illness, the lightheaded condition of undernourishment, for the clear clean used-up feeling of a post-visionary elevation.

He seemed too, to have found a new direction. He need no longer seek beyond himself for that purposive center of things, the still, calm vortex of unlimited and pure potential; he saw — but how can this be explained to you, who are skeptics and scientists and, generally, reasonable men ? he saw, as it were, that by contemplating the physical nature of his every act, especially of his thoughts, he might cause these to grow heavy with a weight which would sink them to the center of themselves, past the portals of Becoming to the heart of Being.

Since it was in his room that he woke to this truth, since the truth itself required rest rather than unrest for its clearest perception, he concluded that he had no need to move out of the room or, indeed, away from his writing table. Each thing here, which had been in the background of a hundred battles he had fought, was familiar to him, would confirm him in his method, would absorb his thoughts and return them to himself, would repeal the tendency of his eye to look for novelty and distraction.

But the translation of purpose into method was more difficult in this case than is usual in the problem of translating plan into action. This purpose implied no-method, any conscious method would leave out far more of himself than it would include: even a painstakingly cautious intuitive proceeding might betray him since he could not be sure to what extent the intuitions might be trained responses shaped by previous, imperfectly perceived experience.

When his mother brought him food now he looked at her as if from a level of existence which shifted, now above, now beneath her, never quite contacting with her own hard material plane, and her

words sailed across to him blown out of shape, distended or stretched pout-ful, touching his ears and rebounding to a corner of the room. In his turn he spoke to her words of glass through which she could see but which she could not see. There was no conflict between them for there was no meeting and no understanding between them.

When he was a child his younger sister had scratched her ankle on a rusty nail protruding from the porch railing of a shabby country house his family had rented for the Summer. Her blood was poisoned; she died. He had heard in himself angry, barely suppressed shrieks that they might have saved her by securing the best medical treatment possible. He knew now that they had: not merely the 'best they could afford' — better than they could afford, the best that had been available. It hadn't been enough, that was all.

Years later, he had been scrupulously saving money to visit a girl who had moved away a year before midst mutual protestations of eternal fidelity, stainless memories and dimless love. A week before he was to have left, his father went bankrupt, the money was needed at home, the trip was off. Inwardly he railed against the vagaries of chance, the blind stupidity of a father that could do this to him, and the malicious injustice of a society that could do this to his father. Months later, the girl was able to visit him, and after the forced affectionate preliminaries he realized they were cold to each other. The visit, if it had been made a few months earlier, might have infused a temporary spasm of activity into their feelings, it would not have changed their course.

Now he saw that the single consistent pattern threading these and, indeed, all other experiences in his life was the lack of pattern, unless he himself were a pattern whose total configuration would never reveal itself. It must be sought out. And the method of seeking it was, precisely, to lie still and, as effectively as possible, avoid the seeking of it.

One thing, however, which the coming-to-be of this new unpatterned direction seemed to demand was one experience additional to the initial perception. An affirming experience. In his vague exchanges with his mother, in his knowledge of the books, papers, bottles, furniture, boxes, which filled his room, perception preceded aloofness, withdrawal, a conscious of the depleted value of these things. He felt that he needed one new experience, to look at one thing he had not physically seen before.

This encounter, to come from outside him, would challenge an unwitting response; would be, as it were, a test of whether the fever had really burned out of him the old way of doing and seeing things. Clearly the encounter could not occur in his room or in his parents' house. He prepared to leave. His clothing, as he dressed, seemed to wrap a stranger's body of whose sensations he was an aloof but intimate witness. Each item fitted closely or carelessly, according to its design; at once impersonal, because thousands just like it had been made in the same size and fashion; and personal because he had worn it before, had been seen in it and had felt it on him.

His mother, seeing him prepare to leave the house so soon after his illness, made the protests he expected her to make, he made the replies she expected to hear, issuing words towards her with the precise degree of assurance which he knew was necessary to deny her the opportunity of continuing the discussion. Descending the stairs he was conscious of how well the fever had worked to undermine his physical well-being, he was shaken off-balance by the hacking, rasping cough which no effort of will, nor complex of medicines had succeeded in alleviating; the cough was, apparently, there to stay.

Out in the street he walked very slowly, in a trancelike unconcerned state which, however, did not prevent the pattern of line and colour, texture and temperature, from impressing him so that later he could have reproduced the scene, not orally and not in minute detail but in a visual sense suggestion which would be true to the quintessential nature of the scene. But none of it seemed to have any importance for him.

He walked on. The day flowed past him, and the streets, traffic passing in a rising-falling rhythm controlled by a distant source. Feeling the cold, and a fatigue which increased with every action, physical or mental, through which he moved, he looked for a place to rest. There was a restaurant just across the point on the street which he had reached.

With a casual assurance of immunity from the possibility of physical violence, he walked slowly across the street while not one of the racing vehicles threatened him with noise or physical proximity. The restaurant, from the outside, looked as if he could have described it with minute accuracy in advance. Did this mean that it had been destined to be the background for the experience he sought or, was it only because every detail of the restaurant was completely inevitable, given certain facts about the community, the society in general and previous restaurants seen ? He thought the latter.

He entered the restaurant, observing, under strain, its interior; mysteriously, despite the enforced conviction of ordinary triviality which everything in the restaurant impressed on him, an air of specialness alerted him. He took a seat cautiously, ordered coffee. When it came, while he drank, he looked slowly around. It was then that he saw the girl and knew he was being confronted with a test of some sort.

It would have been hard to say if she was beautiful. Whatever pleasing quality there was in her face dissolved elusively, played in shifting, evocative suggestions about her simple features. There was only one quality about her face which was other than ephemeral. It lingered in her eyes; a changeless certainty of sadness, even, of tragedy. Those eyes, he knew, would never emit glad messages; they spoke of doom irrevocable. They spoke to him.

This, he knew, could never be taken from him. He had turned to look at her at the precise moment when she, lifting

her eyes to the window, looked out at a bird gliding across a particular ray of sun, which illuminated the bird as if from within, the image of the bird reflecting not merely the sun into the girl's face, but all the warmth and calm that had ever been there or was likely ever to be there. All this he saw and knew that it could never be taken from him.

He knew too that it was not enough. He began to consider again his old problem: how did one make one's presence known to these other presences? But the solution even of this overwhelming puzzle rested on the prior solution of another question: were these occasional minute glimpses that he had, were they like deflected images thrown from the blades of a machine which gyrated in every direction, so quickly that its motion could not be seen? If so, how could he be sure of its rhythm; if he approached at the wrong milli-second everything would be mutilated, a grosser image would be revealed, a compound as far from the nature of what he sought, yet as close to it, as unperceiving is to perceiving. Or were these occasional insights part of an eternal calm existing outside his own pivotings, in which case the slightest motion of his attempt at approach might be an irrecoverable plunge, an engulfment and subsequent disharmony which could never be set right.

He got up from his seat feeling awkward and grossly corporeal, at the same time a lightheaded dizziness, a feeling of insubstantiality, threatened his balance. He pushed change beneath the coffee-cup on the table, walked to the door with a studied effort to ignore the girl and everyone else, left the restaurant and began the lonely, long walk home.

NIGHTMARE

Hilda Taylor

The morning sun crept golden over my wall,
and moved the shadows with its light.
Out of the nightmare visionary night
I woke
to stare with little comprehension
on the shadows of the day;
my limbs unfroze, I moved my head,
my tongue unroofed itself, I spoke:
"Faceless men do not stalk my life
with knives."

The milk gleamed white like one great pearl,
the newspaper lay folded by its side.
Fatuous black letters tell
of crime and passion in the tenements.

The hours of the day run down,
and lose themselves in night.
Anticipation curves my every thought,
and trains me to the unlonely hour
of my love.

NADA, NADA Y NADA

Hugh Latimer

One day in the early fall I was born. And on that day I began to live, or, rather, to exist. I eat and drink with the ultimate purpose of existing, pretending, falsely, that what I am really doing is living. And some day, I shall die. The end will not come voluntarily, but because it is an irrevocable law of nature that everything must die. And when I die, I shall be buried in the ground from which I came. I shall return with a confused, blank, final message to it — my Creator.

Many people before me have successfully completed this cycle. And many more people after me shall do so. What disturbs every cell in my body, nevertheless, is that all-important "I".

"But Robert, surely you are still alive and healthy? Every man living today wants only that."

"Idiot. If you so much as pretend that there exists any reward, moral, spiritual, or otherwise, for the artist, you are unaware of public reaction to the product of the artist. The painter paints because he has a feeling within him that makes him sense some things which others do not see or feel. And he wants to convey that feeling to an intelligent, understanding and sympathetic people. He paints all his life, and eventually, he dies. Twenty years after, he is discovered. Laurels are placed at his feet. Honors are conferred posthumously. But remember, he never sold a painting in his life. Society considered him too radical, too unconventional, called him a stupid individualist, and refused to buy a painting. Where then? Where is the security a painter must have in order to paint without starving? Where are all those cultural organizations designed to help the struggling young artist of today?" He said that last phrase with a slight degree of contempt. There was a bitterness in his voice that certainly did not convey any sort of happiness or satisfaction.

I looked at my friend. He had a point and a valuable one. I saw his soiled hands, beautiful in their whiteness underneath the paint, and in their slenderness. I saw his candid, honest face. I saw the white coat he was wearing, neat, and well-pressed. His tie was loosened at the collar, and his collar was unbuttoned. But, underneath the whiteness and delicacy of his skin, was the desire to teach; the desire to teach society what he had learned from that society. This is the object of the painter.

"Robert, why?"

"I don't know. I really don't know. I work all day. I think all night. I try different methods. But my objective is clear. I have a cause for which I live, and I shall not waver from it, even if it means starvation or failure."

As we walked out to the street, the first snowflakes of the year began to fall, lightly and very thinly. Against the bright street light, the little, soft crystals were dark. And then suddenly, out of the limelight, their whiteness shone. Robert looked at the scene and told me: "Doesn't it remind you of a mother giving birth?"

He left me. He did not wait for an answer to his question, although I thought he deserved one. But I am not sure he wanted an answer.

I walked slowly through the snow, to bed.

There is a little bridge in Mexico called "Esperanza." The word means "hope." There is a little town in Mexico called "Paz." The word means "peace." Funny names for a bridge and a town.

I didn't see Robert for some time. I had supposed that he was working, and since, very frankly, I didn't understand him, I did not particularly want to see him. Thinking about it now, I realize that I have the peculiar habit of shirking from those whom I do not understand, only because I do not want to understand.

I worked every day. The office was complete in that every man working there was a living example of those people Robert deprecatingly calls "machines". We are all machines, in a sense. We pretend that we are intelligent human beings living in an intelligent society. But, in our not too private lives we are forced to admit that we are fond admirers of a cheap, second rate movie star; that we consistently watch our favorite television programs, and that there are a select group of individuals who stand in the public limelight of sweet success who are our heroes. We worship them, and they, in turn, worship us — for they realize that they exist because only human mechanized brains are capable of understanding their somewhat idiotic philosophies of life, and that without us, they would be lost, since they too are only pretending.

I walked out of the office. Automatically I traced my steps to the corner coffee shop where I knew that I would get one cup of coffee and a piece of pie for thirty cents. I economized on my lunch because I still had ten payments on my car. As I passed a department store the name Robert Williams struck my eye. I looked at the paintings. And I was disappointed.

Almost in their entirety they had the same theme, depicting a house, a tree, a bed of flowers, and two mountains. All were trash. The sky in the paintings was cloudy but bright.

I went into the store and bought every painting by Robert Williams that they had in stock. It was an expensive outburst of feeling. But, I felt a need within me that was hungry and required nourishment. The paintings, as far as I was concerned, needed only to be destroyed.

There is a little epigram in the ruins of Thermopylæ: "In peace sons bury their fathers, in war fathers bury their sons."

Robert Williams was sitting in a chair by the window. He was looking out at the people walking down the street. He thought they were very little people. He thought they had little minds. "They are all running," he thought. "Running from something into nothing. I wonder what makes them all tick. Is it money? Is it love? Or fear? Is it merely the desire to live? That must be it. They want to live. They want to live so that they won't have to die prematurely. The extraordinary part of it is that they would all be much better off if they were dead. Dead and buried. They would all be dead and forgotten, and then a new generation could come in and learn how to live, and control their own thoughts, and their movements, and their actions. But that won't be. God-dammed puppets. Slobs. Machines."

In his hand was a paint brush with which he was tapping his knee. I saw him as I would see a thinking, lonely, but happy man. Not as a man who had just defeated his own purpose.

I threw the paintings at him and said nothing, but merely looked at him in disgust. And he looked at me, with no expression. The expression was a calm one, and without ill-feeling, as though I were a small, ignorant and innocent child who had no real idea about the wrong I had done. Then he looked at his paintings for a long time, and then, sadly, he looked at the people again. He asked me: "Why did you do that?"

I looked at him. For a minute I was surprised. I couldn't understand why he had asked me that. It was I who should have put the question to him. The question rung in my ears. At first it was ridiculous and senseless, but slowly, very gradually, the meaning of his question came to me.

I knew why he had done it. He didn't paint the paintings because he was defeating his own cause; it was because he needed an outlet for the emotions and feelings. But there was something else. I could not sense it. It was hidden in the man looking out the window.

There is a graveyard in France where hundreds of unknown soldiers are buried. There is a graveyard in the town where I live where one man is buried. At the head of the grave is a small white marble cross. On the cross is written an epitaph: "Here lies the unknown but discovered painter."

I walk through the city streets. I am not looking for anything in particular. I just walk and think. The snow is on the ground now — firm and no longer pure white, but dirty in parts. Occasionally I hear a voice saying: "The child is born now, and alive, you know. Alive."

A CLOUD OF GRASSHOPPERS

Leonard Cohen

A cloud of grasshoppers
passed before the sun.
I wondered what farm they would devour,
what slave people would go free
because of them,
until my love drew me down
to conclude what I had begun.
Later, clusters of fern apart,
we lay. A cloud of grasshoppers
passed between us and the moon,
going the other way, each one fat
and flying slow,
not hungry for the leaves and ferns
we rested on below.
And when I knew she slept,
I stood up, unseen,
to hear the sounds of freedom start
where they had been.

THE SILENT PROCESSION

Eva Wallner

He is one of the silent procession
Of men whose footsteps, leaving no trace
Tread cautiously, aware of the gulf
That lies between them and another race
Of men, who never bore
The stigma of anxiety upon their face.

He is one of the silent procession
Of men, who, in stilted phrases, said
Words, never their own, uncertain
Even of those. Groping, afraid
And never extending their search
Beyond the reach of numb fingers,
Forever betraying, always betrayed.

MIND AND MATTER

Lillian Pearcey

A vast grayness. In the grayness a cage. And trapped in the cage a wild bird beating his wings against the bars. In the attack was despair and an agony of longing to be free. The wings became bruised and hate grew of the feebleness and pain of his body. Then summoning up his remaining strength he made a last desperate attempt. And he felt the delicate bones of his left wing snap. The wing hung limp, his head drooped and spent of emotion he fell to the ground. Through the unbearable pain he slipped into unconsciousness.

And in the darkness of his mind he saw the bars again. But, as he looked, they seemed to bend and dissolve, and beyond them there lay an endless vista of freedom and space. His body strained towards it. And the movement brought no pain. Hope and strength surged within him and he swept his wings in a deep, graceful arc. And he flew into and beyond the light of the sun, on and on, in swift, effortless motion through dark universes filled with millions of brilliant stars and strange vapours. He came upon many wonders of light, and heat and energy. But within him there was a compelling force that urged him ever further on in search of something more.

Then after a long time he became aware of an intensely bright light lying ahead. A mounting anticipation accompanied by a fear of the unknown propelled him forward. His heart strained, and the sweep of his wings became more compelling. He felt the intensity of an absolute freedom and comprehension within his grasp. But he strove in vain, for the light remained always beyond his reach.

And a vast weariness came to his mind and he became aware suddenly of his solitude. Hunger filled his body, and he felt the desire for the sound of his companions and the nearness of a warm body.

At last he turned and wearily retraced the passage of his flight. And after a time he saw the cage once more, and without thought he entered it. He lay down and the pain of his wing returned and unconsciousness again covered him in darkness.

In that darkness lay also the mind of a man. Hour by hour he lay in darkness and semi-darkness, while his body worked steadily to replace the energy taken by the previous hours of consciousness. Until finally, as dawn came, light slipped into his mind, taking first the form of weird

transient images. Gradually they became more clearly defined, and impelled him to consciousness. His eyes opened and he looked upon another day.

And he cleansed his mouth and body. His skin felt fresh and tingled. And he put on clothes to cover and protect his body. And as he did so he became aware of hunger and his senses anticipated the smell and taste of food. And the food was forthcoming, and he ate. And energy flowed into his body and he felt a sense of well-being.

His mind was stimulated and he spent hour after hour occupied with books and figures. Now and again he rested and savoured the companionship of friends. Until finally his mind became weary of them and he departed from them.

And he enjoyed more food and energy returned for a while to spend itself in the pleasure of music.

And then he went to a woman. Her body was soft and warm against his, and the juices of her mouth were sweet. He breathed the perfume of her skin and felt the pulsating throat under his hand. He heard the sound of her quickening breath, felt the soft belly and warm thighs, and carressing hands.

And afterwards a warmth and peace enveloped him and he lay for a while beside her. A calm veiled his mind and he slipped into the dark haven of sleep.

But he did not rest long and upon awakening an emptiness filled him and he felt a restlessness and desires which could not seem to come to consciousness in his brain. And he shunned company and walked alone, and felt a great weariness of himself.

Then at last he was driven to rest. And he laid down, and again the dimness stole over his mind. But the way to the dark haven was forgotten and all the paths were blind paths.

Then in his wanderings he came upon a bird in a cage and the bird was beating his wings against the bars.

SEA-SONG AND SHEPHERD: FRAGMENT

C. J. Newman

The malady he bent beneath, three days
he bore it to the sea, and, as the tide
ran out, with a seasoning fleck
of the waves and a shrug
of foam and the splitting spitting motion
of the sea, he followed, hindered
by its weight, to where
a legendary fawn
had carelessly been drowned—
its rotting hide a testimony
to the music of the sea;
to the recently failing
music
of the sea.

AUTUMN IDYLL

Tevia Abrams

Michael walked quickly down the sun-drenched avenue, his briefcase a familiar sight to families of the district labourers. Montreal's low-rent, east-end suburbia — virgin territory, someone had nicknamed the area during the post-war building boom. In the years since the construction, foundations have settled or cracked, families have moved in and out, children have grown up, left school and gone to work; but the nickname has stuck.

It was mid-September. Already faint tinges of the season were visible in the newly-planted trees. The saplings looked to Michael like little intrusions marring the symmetry of pavement that stretched unbroken past rows of three-story apartment buildings. Trees just didn't fit into the steel, concrete and glass patterns of the 20th century. Take New York . . . a real town, big city . . . concrete and steel, concrete and steel—and pavement; no trees to spoil the man-made beauty. A park ? Maybe. The country ? Alright. But not in the streets. He recalled the trees on his street had grown so big that their roots had cracked the sidewalk.

"Virgin territory," he said to himself in a burst of enthusiasm, as he stopped before number 1301 on the block. His mesomorphic frame moved with ease into the entrance hall. He wasn't the least bit nervous, or if there was a slight butterfly twitch in his stomach, it remained hidden under the protective wall of personality. Without a doubt, he had grown quite self-confident since the beginning of his sales career some 15 years ago.

Those who knew him during the early years called him a self-made man. When he entered the "game", Michael was a shy, introverted youth of 19. He was afraid of contact with people, and for a time ruined every chance of closing a sale with any prospect. He persisted however, and under the guidance of the company sales manager, read and digested pamphlets, on positive thinking and personality dynamics. He even took to heart the manager's formula for a successful sales career: "Remember and believe that every day and in every way you are getting better and better;" he gained from his experience, and turned early failure into later success. Today, after 15 years, and at the youthful age of 35, Michael was sales manager of a new company—the largest bible publishing firm in the country.

Without the slightest hesitation, he looked at the list of names, then leaned into the buzzer of apartment five. The return sounded. He bounded through the inner door, up the two flights of stairs. He was

already sifting some of the tried and tested approaches in his mind. According to the salesman's manual, drawn up for the company by a team of psychologists, it required a good approach, enthusiastic demonstration, consistent work and a powerful close to clinch a sale. One had to be a step ahead of his prospect, he remembered automatically.

At the top of the stairs, visibly bewildered, stood a tiny woman holding onto the door of apartment five.

"Good afternoon Mrs. Menard — vous parlez anglais n'est-ce pas?" he began.

"Yes. What do you want?"

"Well, my name is Mr. Baird . . . I mean Michael Baird. The company I work for has just printed a brand new bible which we are sure everyone will want to own. Now if I can come in, perhaps. . ."

"Thank you but I am not interested in bibles right now," she interrupted and turned into her apartment.

"Excuse me, madam," he quickly challenged, "but I thought you were Catholic." The words daggered their way through the almost closed door.

"Mais oui, but I am Catholique," was the touched reply. "Please come in, monsieur, I am sorry."

Beaming with confidence, Michael entered the bright, but sparsely furnished apartment. Although there were no rugs on the floor, pictures on the wall or books to be found — all embellishments of the dreary diurnal patterns of the workingman's home — there were nevertheless enough furnishings for simple living. This was going to be a cinch. He seated himself opposite the young housewife, who appeared to be in her middle twenties.

Two obviously pre-school children stopped pulling each other's hair in order to observe the strange man in their midst. With practised assurance, Michael stood up, moved to the children and almost perfunctorily patted their heads.

"Helloo kiddies, vous parlez francais, n'est-ce pas? Nice children you have there, Mrs. Menard." One could easily have substituted a thousand names for her's. The woman for her part, was obviously flattered.

Resuming his seat, Michael curled his hands about his copy of the 'good book' in the manner of a minister who, looking up from the pulpit during a sermon, pressed the bible to his bosom and drove home the moral to his Sunday worshippers. It was a pose of pious humility.

"Actually speaking, I'll be very frank with you, Mrs. Menard. I have here in my hands the world's most beautiful bible — a perfect gift for your husband, your growing children and certainly yourself. When we come right down to it, what better gift is there than the Good Book, so that we can prepare ourselves to meet Our Lord in heaven?"

The woman reached for the handsomely bound volume and leafed through the illustrated pages. She thought she would like to own one like it, but remembered that her husband's salary was just enough to pay for the necessities. This would be too much to buy now. She listened as Michael talked about the contents of the book and its relation to the spiritual sustenance of her family. Now and then she would smile sadly, her hands folded gently in her laps.

Had he been more sensitive, Michael would have been moved to pity by Mrs. Menard's smile, for it revealed all the sadness, the pain, the quiet beauty and the privation of the eternal mother. Observant as he was, he could only see one meaning in that curious smile — it was usually easier to handle people that way.

"Mrs. Menard, be honest with me," he continued. "Don't you think you would be proud to own a bible like this? Believe me, its the only one with an index at the back, so that you can look up any subject . . . and there are hundreds of beautifully coloured pictures that your children could look at. And the price, why only twenty-five dollars, which is cheaper than the cost at any book store."

She tried to muster her opposition.

"I be frank wit you, Monsieur Baird. I would like to buy your bible. It is true it is a very nice book and necessary for every 'ome. But it is ah . . . dificile . . . for us. My 'usban works 'ard, and his pay — well, it is not very much. Trutfully, I no can afford one now."

Quickly Michael fished his memory. The woman's protestations had to be overcome if he were to clinch this sale.

"I think I understand how things are, Mrs. Menard," he said slowly and deliberately, giving himself time to formulate an answer. "But you must also understand that it is God who provides us with food, clothing, shelter and everything else we have on earth. Surely you believe that since Jesus provides us with all these things, He will also show the way for you to have a good bible — if you are sincere and really want it. You believe that, don't you?"

She faltered and smiled weakly.

"I was sure you did," he punctuated.

The frail housewife really believed it. Since her marriage, she had found little time to spare in cultivating the spirit and finding favour with God. She would have liked to attend church more often, but her husband worked alternate weekends. And there were the children . . . she longed for religious fulfillment . . . perhaps Jesus would help her after all.

"My 'husban should know . . .," she stammered, her darting eyes reflecting the confusion of her mind. "Maybe you come back tomorrow, eh?"

It's now or never, Michael thought. He recalled something from the manual.

"Mrs. Menard! Let's stop right now and count our many blessings. Oh, I don't mean your television set, your furniture, your apartment and things like that. I mean your motherhood . . . those beautiful children with five fingers on each hand and five toes on each foot. Yes, if the good Lord is willing to lend us those wonderful children until they must return to Him, let us do our part and try to prepare them for that day."

Michael rose quietly, taking advantage of the pressing silence which ensued, and handed his pad and pencil to the woman. "Press heavy as you write your name," he said sharply, with a note of triumph in his voice. "It has to go through both carbons."

* * *

An eager young man stood before the sales office of the Universal Bible Publishing Company and rapped on the door. He entered and shook hands with the man behind the desk.

"My secretary tells me you want to break into the selling game'?" the seated man queried.

"Yessir," the other replied. "I like the idea of being a salesman. You see, I don't like routine work much, and I sorta like the idea of being my own boss."

"That's the talk I like to hear from a young man. Most of you fellows want to get 'set up' in some company and sit behind a desk all day long. In this business, you're always on the go — meeting new and interesting people. My name's Michael Baird, what's yours?"

"Jim Tivett, sir."

"One thing you've got to remember in this racket, Tivett . . . Never let disappointment get you down. At first it'll be very difficult; but with the right training and experience . . . and hard work why, who knows, you might even have my job in a few years.

"Selling, you know, is like war . . . like you go out armed and you aim to win. You can't win if you have no confidence in your weapons or in yourself. But if you really want to stick with it I can help you gain this confidence. Don't worry about our product — the bibles will just about sell themselves — that's your armour. It's you we have to worry about . . . help you master yourself, like. If you're still interested, I can pass on a little tip to you . . "

"Yessir?" the young man replied, inquiringly.

". . . it helped me when I began and it'll work wonders for you too . . . a really good morale booster. It's a little slogan and its goes like this: every day in every way I am getting better and better. Some psychologist invented it many years ago — it's helped many many people to become more dynamic and successful in business. Come on, let's hear you say it now."

"E-every day in every w-way, I'm getting betterandbetter . . ."

"Good lad! You repeat that every morning in front of a mirror . . . we'll make a man out of you yet. But remember, you really have to make yourself believe it. Actually speaking, Mr. Tivett, I'll be very frank with you. I like your personality and I think you've got what it takes for this job. How soon can you start?"

"I s'pose tomorrow morning. Any idea what sorta salary I can expect, Mr. Baird?" the youth's eyes sparkled in eagerness.

"Well," Michael said haltingly as he toyed with his pencil, "we can discuss that tomorrow — after I speak to the management."

He rose from his desk, shook hands with the young man, and with a broad grin, ushered him out of the office.

"Cocky bastard," he muttered, falling clumsily into his soft chair again. "Probably won't stay more than a few weeks . . . just like the others . . . they don't come prepared for hard work, like they used to. Have my job in a few years? Ha . . . not that pimply thing!"

He looked at his watch. Lunch hour. He slumped further into his chair until the springs squeeked, his tired eyes ironically level with the 'Salesman's Prayer' which hung in a frame on the wall. The professional look of suave assurance gave way slowly to a puzzled expression. When his secretary entered a few minutes later to empty the 'out basket', Michael was fast asleep. She took an instant to tidy the desk. At the door, she glanced back at her boss. It seemed to her he looked old for his age.

LAMENT

D. Kraslavsky

Having left his fleet to guard the river bank,
A lonely boy,
His crawling body pretending to swim,
Sought in a scar lined pond of slowly aging lotus
A private leaf
To cut away and drift with.

Discovering his first flower
He yearned to share its growth;
Capturing it with the small sword of his hand
He killed the bloom he would befriend.
Wounded,
This admiral of a fleet of children
Never to salute his uniform,
Conquered a rivered blossom
And turned home with the suns setting cries
Decorated with the milk blood of a murdered friend.

The child grown,
Body pale,
Living in some greenhouse near the sea,
Seeks in thirst, like petals captured in the last of fall,
The friendly hands of water.
A flower blooming on his hairless chest
He contemplates the capture of sailing friends.

A SHORT FEBRUARY STORY

Gerald Tenenbaum

He waited some three hours, sitting on the hard, wooden bench in the employment office before they called him forward for an interview. Finally, when he at last was seated before the interviewer's desk and heard the man begin to speak, he knew that it was going to be the same old story. No job. Just another speech. He had heard the same damn speech so many times these past three months, that he could almost mouth, word for word, what the man sitting across him would utter next. A whole damn afternoon wasted. He should have known better. He fidgeted with the newspaper in his lap, impatient for the man to finish his mock-solemn oratory.

" . . . and you must realize, Mr. Adamson," the man was saying, "that this lay-off is only a temporary thing. The economy, you see, is, uh, how shall I put it, in a period of 'levelling-off', so to speak, and that's one of the reasons why so many firms have had to cut production, you see. But, uh, I feel confident that in a few short weeks, we will be receiving many job-orders. Now about the only thing . . . " But Mr. Adamson had stopped listening. His attention shifted over to the window, slightly to the right of where the man was sitting. Two flights down below he could see where the two streets intersected, lying between the pile of buildings on either side like primordial, slush-rutted, chasms. In the center, a policeman stood, black hat, black coat, white mitts, his arms waving, mechanical, puppet-like. The cars surged forward and the cars stopped, and the diminutive, depthless, people scurried busily across the streets, disappearing out of sight, and then more people swept by, and once again the cars stopped, and once again the cars hurtled forward; back and forth, stop and go, all with just the flick of a hand. For a moment his gaze fixed upon a man threading his way through the maze of traffic, scuttling like a beetle to reach the other side. Mr. Adamson saw him safely across, and then smiled vacuously, to himself. Then suddenly, catching himself, daydreaming, he quickly turned his attention back to the interviewer.

" . . . in the meantime, if you take my advice, I'm sure that — "

"Advice?"

"Yes. About contacting your church or one of the social agencies to see about getting some assistance for you and your family. Well, that's about all we can do at present, as I say, come back in about two, three weeks . . . if anything comes up in the meantime I'll give you a call. I think I . . . oh yes, here it is. Well Mr. Adamson," he said, closing the dossier on his desk, "goodbye and goodluck."

Mr. Adamson stood up and turned abruptly without saying the perfunctory goodbye and walked towards the door. Walking downstairs, he buttoned his overcoat and tied his scarf securely about his neck. He pulled his cap on and stepped outside into the cold, February afternoon. He walked quickly down the sloping street, listening to the snow crunching under his feet. It was getting colder. It would probably snow too. That would make it all the better. He knew what he would have to do now. He had thought about it for a long time. Those bastards. Those goddam bastards. How'd they expect him to last through the winter? Church. Social agency. Huh! Some laugh. But he wasn't licked yet. He'd show them. If that's the way they wanted it — okay. It suited him fine. He wasn't gonna starve on their account. Not by a long shot. Christ, he wanted to take any goddam job. He didn't care. As long as he brought some money home. He had a family to take care of. Fat lot they cared, though. Well, by christ, he'd show them. He'd show those bastards.

He stopped at the bus-stop at the corner and waited, shuffling from foot to foot, his hands deep in his coat-pockets, until the bus came. He sat down at the back, juggling to and fro, not caring, letting the anger seethe within him. He would do it tonight. Why not? Why wait any longer? It was no use putting it off. Christ if he didn't have his rent in by next week that bastard of a landlord would kick him out. He wasn't bluffing, either. Not that sonofabitch. So what was he worrying about? It would be easy. What the hell was the matter with him? Christ, hadn't he figured out every move before? Yes. Tonight. Tonight's as good as any other night. He had chickened out before but now it was different. He would go ahead and do it. Hell, even if he got caught it wouldn't be so bad. At least then somebody'd take care of Betty and the kids. Yes. His mind was made up. He'd do it. Tonight.

Then he arrived at his stop. He got off and walked the two blocks to his house. It was an old, run-down, faded-brick building with an outside staircase. He occupied one of the three cold-water flats, the one on the second floor. He climbed the stairs and went inside. The light was on in the kitchen. It cast an oily yellow, sheen on the linoleum.

"Jim? Jim, that you?" his wife called from the back of the house. He didn't answer her but went straight into the bedroom and lay down across the bed. The room was dark. Funny, he was sweating. His hands and forehead. This was no way for him to be acting. What was there to be scared of? He swallowed hard. There was a strange queasiness in his stomach. The gun. He got up and fished around under his shirts. Yes. Here it is. Looks as real as any gun. He shoved it into his coat pocket. When he heard his wife's footsteps he laid down again on the bed. She came into the room rubbing her hands in a dish-towel.

"I thought I heard you come in." She switched on the light. "Why don't you take off your coat, for god's sake, you wanna catch cold or somethin'. Jim are you okay?"

"Yah, yah, I'm okay. Close the light willya?"

"Gee, for a minute there you had me scared. Comin' in like that — no hello, no nothin' ".

"Look, will you please close that bloody light."

"What's the matter with *you* all of a sudden?" She walked over to the bed. Here, lemme feel your—" He sat up, pushing her hand away.

"Take your goddam hand away, willya? Look willya do me one little favour, eh. Just go out of the room and leave me alone. What do I have to do, draw you a picture or something? Just blow outta here and close that bloody light."

"What happened at the employment place?" she asked, sitting down on the bed beside him.

"What d'ya mean 'what happened' what the hell did you expect to happen. I told you in the first place it was a—"

"I mean what'd they tell you?"

"Nothing. Not a damn thing."

"Nothing . . . "

"Nothing! Nothing!" he shouted. "What are you deaf or something. He said there were no jobs. Not for three weeks anyway. Do you know what he told me? In the meantime, he says, 'why don't you get in touch with your church.' Or maybe go down to the Salvation Army and wait in line for a few hand-out. That stupid son-of-a-bitch."

" What're we gonna do now, Jim? What're we gonna do? Mr. Weegan called and said that — oh Jim, Jim." She began to cry, dabbing her eyes with a kleenex.

"Aw look, honey. You don't have to cry. We'll figure something out. In fact I've got a few deals on the fire". He put his arm around her shoulders. "Yah, in fact that's what I came home to tell you. I've got this here deal cooking. I'm gonna meet this fella tonight. Something'll come up. Now come on, honey. Don't cry. Everything will work out. You wait and see. Now come on." Her sobbing became less audible. "Did you talk to your mother at all today?" he asked.

"Uh-huh".

"How're the kids? Lonesome, I bet."

"Momma says they're okay."

"Well don't worry. They'll be coming home soon. If this deal comes through . . . " He stood up looking at his wristwatch. "Hey, I'd better get out of here if I want to keep my appointment."

"Aren't you gonna eat any supper? I've got some stew on the stove. It'll only take a minute, to—"

"No. No, I'm not too hungry. Anyways I'm late as it is." He walked out of the room. His wife called after him, "Jim, you won't be home late". "I won't" he called back from the hallway.

Once again he went outside into the cold night air. The streetlamps were lit, he could see them, bobbing down the street, suspended like irridescent bubbles, in the black, grimy sky, their yellow-white light spotlighting the snow-packed street, flickering lazily across the squat houses. Some kids were playing hockey further down. He stopped to watch them. They ran tirelessly back and forth between the two makeshift goals, yelling lustily, laughing shrilly, banging at the puck, bumping into one another. Once when he was about fifteen, when he lived out in Brantford, he had played on one of the City teams. He was good, too, damn good. Everybody said that he had the makings of a pro. Even the coach. "Practice," he had said. "All you need is lots of practise." Then his father died and they had to move to Toronto, and he had to go to work to support the family. He never played hockey again.

He continued along down the street. He almost decided to take a streetcar at the corner, but he resisted. It wouldn't do him any good to be seen. He'd better walk. It was safer. Who knows? Some wise guy might recognize him. That's all he needed. He pulled his cap down lower over his forehead. He crossed over at Desmond Street, and walked quickly along keeping his eyes on the ground.

When he came to the tavern, he went inside, and sat down at one of the side tables. The room was gloomy, ill-lit, and a permanent greyish cloud of smoke hung suspended in the air. When the waiter came over, he ordered two beers, and then took out the newspaper from his coat pocket and held it up before him, pretending to be engrossed in what was written. Actually he didn't give a damn about what was in the news. Sometimes he'd read the sports page, or the comic strips, and he always glanced over the want-ads. But that was about all.

He sipped the beer slowly. Nothing like a good cold beer to make him relax. Christ, but he sure needed this. He was jittery as hell. After he finished the two beers he felt better. There was a warm, heavy feeling in his stomach. He wished he could order another one, but his money was

low. Hell, what did he have to worry about money for? After tonight — pooh, he wouldn't have to worry. He called over the waiter and ordered another two beers. This time he sipped them very slowly, just killing time, and picturing once again in his mind, what he would have to do.

Finally he got up, patting the gun reassuringly and went outside. He felt good. He was sure of himself now. He would do it just as he planned. When he came to the parking lot, he walked around several times until he was sure the streets were empty. Then he sneaked carefully through the lane, and hid in the side-door of the building, the back of which faced the parking lot. He was in the shadows and well out of sight. Now he would just have to wait until some rich bastard came around to get his car. He put his hand in his pocket, his fingers tightening around the handle of the gun. Hurry up you bastard. It's cold out here. His teeth began to chatter.

Then after a while he heard someone walking into the lot. It was a man. Alone, too. Adamson made his move instinctively, darting out and crouching behind a car. He watched the man moving somewhere towards the back of the lot. Perfect. Now in an instant he knew what he would do. Adamson surveyed the lot and then out toward the street. Empty. He stood up, and raced up behind the man, pulling the gun out of his pocket. His heart pounded crazily in his throat. The man turned, a dumb, aghast look on his face.

"Okay, mister," Adamson said, his voice low, flat. "Just keep on walking and keep your mouth shut and don't try anything funny. I've got a gun in your back." Adamson shoved the gun back into his pocket, still holding it tightly. It was all like a dream. The man moved forward, Adamson close at his side. "Over there." He motioned towards the laneway. "What are you — ." The man's voice quavered. "Shut up," Adamson said. "Okay. Stop here. Let's have your wallet. Come on. Come on. Hurry it up."

"No . . . no . . . " The man turned, catching Adamson by surprise, and began running towards the street. Adamson grabbed for him and missed. He started after him then stopped short, panicking. He could hear the man's loud, shrill shouts, 'Help . . . help . . . ' Then Adamson turned, his body suddenly all rubbery, weak. He raced feverishly in the opposite direction. What had happened? What had gone wrong? A voice sounded somewhere in the distance behind him, 'Stop him . . . stop that man . . . ' He ran faster, his stomach a hard lump, up the street, passing a group of people, who turned, staring as he rushed by, and then he turned and ran down a side-street, stumbling once, and rising, and running forward again, knowing that he had failed, knowing that his whole life had suddenly crumbled before his eyes, the dreams, the hopes, the future, everything, gone, and he was left with a cold hollow nothingness, a numb incomprehensible fear, a wish to suddenly throw himself in front of the bus that was just now roaring up the strreet; but he stopped waiting for it to pass, and watched the red, tail-lights flickering out in the distance. He ran again, down another street, running until he could run no more, and he stopped, his breath

rising and falling in short, painful gasps, and he stood leaning up against a tree, his hand sliding down the black, ice-coated bark. He kneeled down, his chest aching, and the cold, thin air burning in his nostrils. Again, as he knelt there, for one fateful moment, he almost decided to give in, stretch out on the ground, to close his eyes, to wait until they found him. But then again he got up, and began walking, unsteadily, down the street. Two blotches of snow clung to the bottom of his coat. He stopped, brushing them off. His breathing became more even.

When he reached his street, he walked up the side lane, and entered his house through the back gallery. The door was open. He went inside, into the dark, silent kitchen, hearing the coals softly turning over in the stove. He took off his overcoat, draping it over a chair. Then he went quietly through the hall to his bedroom. He peeled off his shirt, and sat down on the edge of the bed, taking his shoes and stockings off. He stood up again, stood watching the sleeping form of his wife, her breathing calm, even, her face peaceful, innocently beautiful. He stood, swaying dizzily in the darkened room; then he slipped off his trousers, and lay down in the bed beside her, careful so as not to waken her. His undershirt was wringing wet. He pulled the blanket up under his chin. He shivered slightly.

For a long while he lay, huddled under the blankets, his feet drawn up towards his chest, his eyes open, staring at the impenetrable wall, noticing where the wallpaper had started peeling, and thinking, 'Christ it's funny, here I am thinking about the goddam wallpaper', but he didn't laugh. He just lay for a long time, staring into the dark wall, and shivering in the dank, still, silent, room.

FŒTUS

Mary Webb

When the alarm went off at 5.30 she woke from a frantic confusion of dreams to the dull semi-reality of the room about her. In the grey dawn light the furniture shouldered itself into her consciousness with lumpy familiarity: the hulking dressing table, the tall, thin wardrobe. She lay staring at their shadows for a dazed moment and then, gently, with agonized care, lifted her head from the soiled and sour-smelling pillow. She fumbled her way across to the light switch and the naked bulb was indecent in it's glare, reducing the room to its shabby futility.

She shuffled to the dressing table and her reflection stared out at her, mercilessly clear in the harsh light. Every hard year of the fifty-five she had lived was written there, indelibly. Her thick grey hair, still abundant, stuck out now in wisps. Her face still retained it's roundness, but heavy lines drawn by fear and fatigue found their way between lips and nose. Yesterday's lipstick still hung stubbornly on a mouth that drooped a little at the corners. She turned away from the reality before her and her red eyes, crusted at their outer corners, searched the room as if for a shadow to creep into and found nothing but the rumpled grey-linen bed and a broken-down chair heaped with clothing. Yawning, she groped her way to this and a flabby hand sorted through the heap until it came up, triumphant, with brassiere and girdle. Into these she reluctantly forced a body heavy with the unhealthy fat of a banal triviality.

The alarm clock, still ticking hostilely by her bed, reminded her of the time. Awake now, she contemplated washing, but the thought of the icy water against her dully aching head discouraged her. She rubbed a powder puff, grimy and black over her face, combed her hair back into it's thick bun and pressed a new layer of lipstick over the old. She slipped on rimless glasses and looked again closely at the reflection. The metamorphosis of a frowzy, middle-aged slut into the somehow motherly-looking woman peering back at her gave a slight twinge of satisfaction. Shabby as they were, the clothes at least concealed her. There was no trace of last night's sly half-bottle of gin consumed quietly before Ray had tiptoed to her room, listened, and then continued on to his. She eased the empty bottle under the bed to join the others.

She had started to drink shortly before Tim left her, just a little at first, to ease the pounding headaches which now were with her almost constantly, but had then been only occasional. Tim, her husband, would bring liquor home from time to time, and she would wait until the level of the liquid was low enough so that a little missing would never be noticed. When, eventually, he had noticed it, there had been a very violent fight, one of the many that preceded their separation.

Fumbling for a match, she lit the small gas burner under the coffee pot. Disturbed at the movement, a roach scurried into the space between sink and wall. She gave an involuntary shudder of loathing. How she hated the dirty things! They came up from the factory downstairs and there was no controlling them. When they had found this place, perched on the top floor of a building given over to small clothing companies, she had made a half-effort to clean and keep it clean. In a month she had given up the struggle. Grime, roaches and the pervading stench of the lavatory next door made it futile. Her eight hours of charring in two suburban homes left her too tired to do anything but cook supper for herself and Ray and, when he went out on his invariable rounds at night, creep away to her hard-bought bottle.

As she drank the scalding coffee, some of her fatigue began to leave her. To-day, after all, was a day to be happy or, at the least, a bit excited. It was Ray's 25th birthday. Twenty-five years ago, in near-death and wracking agony, she had brought a son into the world. It was the one accomplishment in a lifetime of nothing. She had failed at everything else. She had stopped her schooling at fifteen to marry her first husband, and she had never borne him a child. When he died, some years later, she had married Tim. Now Tim too had left her, in a different way, but at least she had their son, whose birth had been accomplished with her own near-death. Broodingly she remembered the face of the young doctor, harassed and anxious at the sudden complication, totally unexpected, of a breach-birth. She had been mercifully unconscious during the last moments. Afterwards, it was weeks before she even wanted to see the child who had been to her only a ball of snarling pain refusing to be expelled from her damaged body.

Twenty-five years ago! To-day he was all that remained to her. Picking up her handbag she furtively searched the spot behind the tear in the lining, and her fingers encountered the crisp five-dollar bill. He hadn't found it! She calculated swiftly. The birthday cake she'd had her eye on, a little extra for supper: a new pair of the diamond-socks he liked. She might make it, just!

She went into his room before she left. He lay sleeping, his knees curled up to his chest. His fair, damp, child's hair clung to his forehead and the draped blanket was kind to his plump body. His clothes were, as usual, scattered on the floor where he had dropped them. With practised skill she searched through his pockets. Sometimes, not often, on these nocturnal ramblings, he got money: once as much as $10.00. She knew, all too clearly, how he got it. The group of tough young men who were his companions on these wanderings paid for his company. He was their court jester. Simple, retarded since puberty, he knew of no other way to make a living. Job after job had rejected him, with the suggestion that he try elsewhere. But it was always the same. His mind was not quick enough for the simplest problem. It gave him a peculiar air of innocence, this helpless stupidity, and it made him credulous and gullible. That was when the money came: sometimes, to carry a message or hold on to a parcel

overnight, he was paid in money instead of the usual hamburgers, cokes, or the overly-greasy Chinese food he loved to eat. His seeming popularity among these young men of the city's half-world was the dearest thing in his life.

She stood over him for a long, silent moment. Her hand reached out and pulled the blanket higher about his shoulders. He stirred and muttered, protesting, and she suddenly knew that if he spoke to her in his too-high immature boy's voice, she could not stand it. She could no longer endure the drawn-out recitations of his imaginary triumphs. She stole from the room, her nerves screaming for the temporary relief of gin. She removed the bottle from it's hiding place under the tin refrigerator in the kitchenette, broke the seal, and poured herself a shot. The quick warmth diffused energy through her and she began to descend the long staircase to the street.

All through that day's scrubbing of floors and cleaning of woodwork, her mind kept yearning homeward to her son. She could picture him in the endless pattern, sleeping through the day to escape the sense of his futility and then, just before she came home, dressing and, still phlegmatic, sitting down to wait for her. He neither could, nor even thought, of cooking the evening meal. All his life she had fed him: all his life he would continue to wait for the feeding.

The headache pounded behind her eyes, pressing like a weight on the eyeballs. The taste of her mid-day lunch lay sour and heavy on her stomach. Her mind kept going regardless, reviewing the same hopeless thoughts.

On the streetcar going home, she sat, involved in her own thoughts, brooding a little as her body tensed to the expected climax of the first swift drink before supper, but she forced herself to shop before going home. Clenching her handbag tightly, she entered the pastry shop and handed over a dollar and a quarter for the gaudy birthday cake. In the men's clothing store she purchased the diamond socks, and saw herself for a moment in an oblong mirror, and felt the weight of her bloated body. A feeling of uselessness washed over her as she purchased steak for supper in the corner butcher shop and realized that only fifty cents was left now between herself and the pay-day four days off.

Home now, she climbed the long staircase, panting and pausing now and again for breath. Memory pierced her suddenly: body swollen, as it now felt, legs heavy as lead, as they now were, she had climbed a staircase to the third-floor flat where she and Tim had once lived, her body full with child, her mind aching with this same dull animal resentment.

The flat was empty: Ray was not there. She looked in the room and the kitchenette, even in her room, but he was not there. She sat down dully on her bed and fumbled with the bottle she had snatched up

in the kitchen. The first drink brought her sudden warmth and a feeling of sensual unconcern. The contentment was replaced by a dull aching. Who did he think he was, leaving before she even came home, to go out with his hot-shot friends ?

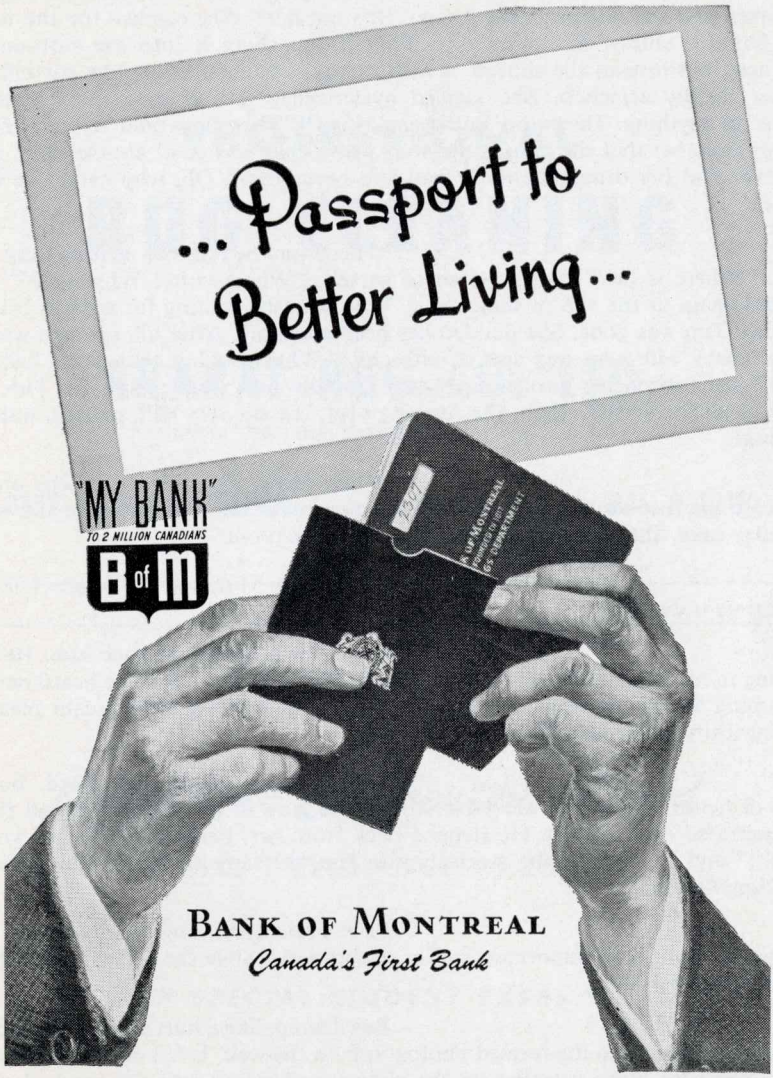
She wandered about the empty rooms, the anger growing in her. Bad enough that he drained everything out of her, he had now failed in his duty to be there when she came home. She did not really know why she felt this, they had so little to say to each other, and he left immediately after gulping his food. She merely felt that he should be there.

Her hand fluttered to her stomach and she sat down in the broken-down armchair beside the table, and had another drink. It was his birthday. He should be home on his birthday! She began a maudlin weeping. All the unhappiness and hopelessness of her life swept over her in an overwhelming flood. Clear, sharply focused images flashed across her mind like a kaleidoscope gone mad. Tim, as he had been before Ray was born, before she had become heavy and clumsy and perpetually racked by headache. Was it her fault that the boy was retarded; why had Tim looked at her with such half-contemptous reproach, blaming her for those weeks when she had rejected the child for all it's abnormalities. It wasn't fair! She wept at the injustice of it, and swallowed a little more consolation. Suddenly, inexplicably, Tim's face faded out in her mind to be replaced by her mother's. She had loved her mother and had tried to be a good daughter to her. When her mother died, the only clear emotion of her life went with her, and she had wept inconsolably. The minister who had seemed to be constantly present during those days had tried to console her. "Only in death are we truly re-born into a better life," he told her, and she had felt some sort of comfort.

In the deepening dusk of the shabby parlor, peering at the framed photograph of her mother over the table, she sat, suddenly stilled, as if some great and wonderful news had come to her. Over and over again the minister's words came back to her, echoing in her mind like a kind of summons. She got up, switched on the lamp under its cheap and faded pink satin shade. She busied herself with the parcels she had brought, putting the meat into the tin ice-box, sliding the cake onto a plate and putting it, on the parlor table, next to the diamond socks which she left in their manilla wrapping. She set the table mechanically. Plates, cutlery, a large kitchen-knife for cutting the cake. Then she sat down to wait.

She drank slowly and steadily now as the darkness encroached on the pink satin lamp, leaving her isolated in it's distorted pool of light. The drink eased her deceptively into forbidden passageways of thought. What if he had died at birth, as all had expected him to. What if in death Ray, her son, had really been born into a better life than any he could ever expect here. Ah, how much better for them all, never to have known his futile scheming, never to have known the endless years of bearing him like a child within her, an endless weight, a burden to be with her until she died. Her mind twisted away from the thought, rejecting it, but with one long tentacle of fascination, fondling it

(Continued on page 46)



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also. How wonderful to be rid of this eternal pregnancy! Her hand pressed her abdomen and she moaned once more, "It's not fair!" She reached for the bottle and found it empty. She wanted to fling it, smashing it into the surrounding darkness, but instead she shoved it with exaggerated care under the surveillance of her shabby armchair. She giggled hysterically, "It's a good thing he never cleans up anything. The empty bottles he'd find!" Then he would try and get the money from her that she bought the stuff with. That was it, of course! Ray must not ever find her drunk, he never had and never must. Oh, why hadn't he been home!

Where was he? It was getting very late now. "Where is he?" she muttered to herself, "Where is he! Why is he?" She giggled again at the slip of the tongue. Who was she waiting for anyway? Tim? No, no, Tim was gone. She nodded her head solemnly. After all, no man wanted a fat, heavy wife who was always with child. Why wouldn't that damn baby be born? She rubbed her swollen abdomen fretfully and wept again, for Tim, but most of all for herself. Then, the weeping over, she sat very still, patient, waiting, waiting!

When finally she heard his steps on the staircase she rose heavily and looked for a moment at the pink and blue and white birthday cake. She was there when he came into the room.

"Gee, maw, I'm sorry! I guess I forgot what time it was!"

She turned, calmly, to face him. He was jiggling in his large, pink, fat hand, a pen-flashlight. In her mind she heard herself, screaming at him to stop. He was near her now, looking with vacant pleasure and curiosity at the birthday cake.

"Where were you?" she asked, but in spite of herself the words were slurred and the aura of gin twisted around them. It penetrated even to him. He stepped back from her, bewildered. "Maw, you're drunk!" and on his face she suddenly saw Tim, the same revulsion and the same rejection. On *him!*

"I've been celebrating your birthday. The day you're born is so important, so I'm celebrating." Slyly she added, "See what's in the parcel for you."

Bewildered, like a hurt animal, he stepped back, blundering into the framed photograph on the wall. It fell on the uncarpeted floor. She bent down, picking up the picture and stared into the cracked glass. She flung it aside, pounced on the kitchen knife in one motion, and slashed in the second. He fell sideways, his throat a blur of blood. She lay beside him, braced for the moment, and grasping her thighs, forced them. Her screaming subsided as she rolled over to a twenty-five year old birth, and eased a breast into the still-warm mouth.

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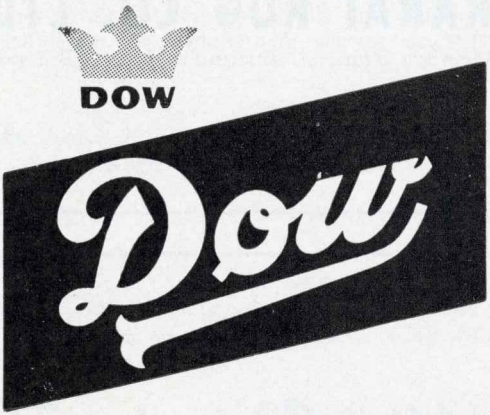

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